TL 1039

An interview of Agir pour Timor with the French foreign ministry

The interview took place with Mme Ducolomier on January 31st, 1990. Two persons were present: Pascal Huyart and Antonio Dias. The following is a translation of notes taken by Pascal Huyart.

Note: Despite the interview format, this is *not* a faithful record of the words actually pronounced.

Agir pour Timor: How does France perceive East Timor?

Mme Ducolomier: France is interested in East Timor through Indonesia. The Portuguese, who miscarried their decolonisation, left it without any possible future. The island was then forcibly invaded by Indonesian troops. However, France will not fight for independence of East Timor.

ApT: Why such a position on East Timor's independence? What does France propose to help the East-Timorese people?

D: France's position is pragmatic. You have to be aware that East Timor had no government. Moreover its independence was bound sooner or later to be questioned for economic reasons. It is unquestionable that East Timor's problem is entire. France and Europe have already protested against the violation of human rights in East Timor.

ApT: But didn't France abstain in the UN on the question of East Timor? So as Europe in general! Then what does it do concretely to denounce the East-Timorese genocide?

D: For one year, and especially in the last six months, France and Europe have multiplied approaches of Indonesian representatives and directly Mr Suharto's government, to show growing concern about the situation in East Timor and the peculiar attention they bear to the serious problems of human rights violations in this area. It is important to know that France is in permanent touch with the Ambassador (?) Mr Ali Alatas who takes notes of French and European positions.

ApT: Don't you feel you waste your efforts if afterwise you abstain in the UN?

D: Nothing is simple, you know! The European position was difficult to adjust, because some countries prefer to put forward commercial interests rather than human rights issues. France always tries to tackle both questions abreast. Concerning UN abstentions, let us be clear! A front attack to Indonesia would not only be a mistake, but

mainly would be totally inefficient. Abstaining doesn't mean "I close my eyes", but on the contrary "this is not acceptable". We want to keep contact in that way with Indonesia in the UN because a massive European vote against Indonesia would unavoidably provoke its departure from the Organisation as has been the case before for the Malaysia affair.

ApT: This European position doesn't stand as an excuse for refusing to protect East-Timorese students who had come explicitly to seek political asylum in European Embassies?

D: We cannot interfere with Indonesian affairs. This is not our embassies' responsibility...

ApT: Yet it is European embassies' responsibility in Chile when it comes to protecting opponents?

D: Yes but!... The status of a political refugee is normally granted to a foreigner who, having come to France, requires it, provided this request meets criteria for attribution of this status. In embassies this is more delicate. It is a case-by-case answer and there it was an European decision. European yes! You understand...

ApT: But the Indonesians plundered East Timor. They pillaged coffee, rice fields, Chinese commerces... They killed 250,000 people, displaced, tortured them, raped the women, filled concentration camps, starved the population! And France, together with Europe, do nothing!

D: You have to start from the present situation, not the historical one. There has been a definite economic improvement in East Timor for some years. It is better to support the present trend rather than break it by reminding facts for which we can't do anything anymore.

ApT: But this is not true! The only known improvements in the economic situation are due to Javanese settlements in towns. They have to be fed so, indeed, the East-Timorese can have the scraps. But everything done in East Timor is done in the benefit of Indonesians only! Nothing is done for the Timorese.

D: In any case, what could East Timor expect alone! Nothing. It would be more desirable that East Timor profits, as the other islands, by a development in the Indonesian whole. True, the present power in Indonesia is very cumbersome because it is a dictatorship which rests on corruption. That is why Europe privileges contacts with anti-Suharto Indonesian officials so as to influence towards the overthrow of this power. But so far as East Timor is concerned, its future is still better secured so!

ApT: In Saudi Arabia there is a two-geared society. A society which could be called primitive (illiterate, living with ancestral techniques of Arab nomadism...) and a

developed society based on the oil manna. Now there is oil in East Timor. There is an East-Timorese intelligentsia, now for a great part in exile (or eliminated). If Europe had interposed more virulently from the beginning, there could have been a real and lasting development of the East-Timorese people in the respect of its cultural integrity. And what do we see? Australia and Indonesia share the oil in the Timor sea over the deads of the repression! And what does Europe do? It ignores the ptoblem!

D: Portugal had done nothing in East Timor. The situation was different. Concerning Australia, I admit that Europe hasn't understood everything, because at the beginning it had a clear position against what happened in East Timor. Besides, we have let them know through our ambassadors that their present position was endorsing Indonesian policy, which was unacceptable. Actually we hope for a change in Indonesia. Suharto is used up and the military, who at present are using the resistance to better settle and plunder the country, soak in corruption. With a new, more liberal power, East Timor would be in good hands. This would be beneficial for the East-Timorese and Indonesian peoples as a whole. This is Europe's present bet in front of this painful issue. We do whatever possible to limit Indonesian violations in East Timor while favouring integration with Indonesia. We consider it is in the nature of things, and is the best possible choice for the East-Timorese people.

ApT: But when no Timorese will remain, the problem will actually be solved!

D: You shouldn't be so pessimistic.

After having recalled the sad Indonesian record, given the last news from occupation of the territory, recalled the alarming economic situation, the representatives from ApT have given the reasons for their pessimism.

D: You are an NGO. You are certainly right but our viewpoint is that of a government in Europe. We cannot go as far as you do. Go ahead, have your cause known! But we for the moment keep the same policy.

Following this interview, Mme Ducolomier admitted that she had much difficulty to have information and therefore wished that we provide her what we had.

This point should be stressed:

First she told us that France wouldn't fight for East Timor's independence; just as France finds illusive (by realism) Bishop Belo's demand for a referendum. Then she proceeded and wished to make it clear that there was no foreign policy of France towards East Timor as isolated from the rest of Europe, that positions are taken by the Twelve. Not accepting the students in the embassies, for example, was an European decision (hence, also, Portugal).